

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Gabrielle Barnes. I am a resident of Hartford, CT. I stand in support of a rent cap and in support of SB 4, with changes to better protect tenants.

In 2016, I received a letter from the property management company that I was renting from that they sold the building and upon renewal of my lease my rent would be increased by nearly \$300 a month. Unable to afford this increase and with no safety net to support me, I began looking for a new place to live. It was such a challenge to find a place to live that wouldn't exceed 30% of my income and didn't come with a pest problem or was in major disrepair. My anxiety increased as my lease end date drew near and I ended up having to move into a friend's home temporarily until I could find an affordable place to live.

For context, I was working full-time in a professional position just after receiving my master's degree. I was making \$50,000 a year, which, after taxes, health care costs, and my mandatory 5% retirement contribution, my take home pay was only \$2400 per month. 30% of \$2400 is \$720. In 2016, it was nearly impossible to find a 1 bedroom apartment for less than \$800. Fast forward to 2023, I just looked to see what I could get for \$800 per month and the results turned up 5 apartments. Typical rates for a 1 bedroom are now at nearly \$1100!

Who, in this economy of high rents, low wages, excruciating student loan debts, and rising food costs can afford to have their rent suddenly increased by hundreds of dollars with only months (sometimes weeks) to prepare?

Here are some undeniable reasons to support SB 4:

1. *Wages have not kept up with rental prices thus renters can't afford these steep increases*
  - Over the last two decades through the five-year period of 2017-2021, median rents increased in Connecticut nearly twice as much as the income of renters.
  - If adjusted for inflation, the median household income of renters actually *dropped* by 13%.
  - Median rent has spiked further in the state over the last two years, increasing by 20%.
  - 52% of CT renters are already cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on rent.
  - Black communities, Seniors, and people with disabilities are disproportionately housing cost burdened.
2. *Skyrocketing rent is driving homelessness*
  - Skyrocketing rent is driving homelessness, increasing evictions—now higher than pre-pandemic averages—and displacing families from their homes and long-term
  - The Government Accountability Office found that a median rent increase of \$100/month was associated with a 9% increase in homelessness
  - Once median rent surpasses 32% of median income—once a community

passes the “cost-burdened” threshold as defined by HUD—homelessness increases faster

I strongly support a rent cap, but SB 4 would be stronger with the following changes:

- **The cap should be lower—I suggest 2.5 or 3%.** This tracks pre-pandemic average rent increases and would be affordable and predictable to tenants.
- **It should cover apartments in between tenants** so landlords can’t push out tenants to increase the rent.
- **It should expand good cause eviction protections** to cover all tenants so they have greater stability in their homes.

I hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will listen to their constituents who support this bill and voted for you in order to be heard. Please vote favorably this year to protect the basic human access to safe, affordable housing for all Connecticut workers.

Thank you for your time,

*Gabrielle Barnes*

Hartford, CT